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SIPDIS

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LONDON AND PARIS FOR NEA WATCHER

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: GOT RELEASES PRISONERS AHEAD OF NATIONAL HOLIDAY

REF: TUNIS 1076

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In the two weeks preceding November 7, the anniversary of the day President Ben Ali took power, the GOT released two large groups of prisoners. The government frequently releases prisoners before major national holidays; such was the case with journalist Slim Boukhdhir, who was released shortly before Tunisian Republic Day in July. On October 30, the GOT released 23 prisoners who were originally arrested between January and June in connection with unemployment protests in the southwestern mining region of Gafsa. Some commentators have speculated that the releases were an attempt to mollify the supporters of the protestors. Of those released, 13 were from the mining town of Redeyef, while 10 others came from the neighboring towns of Oum Laaraies and M,dhilla.

¶2. (C) On November 4th, 22 more people were released. These included 21 former an-Nahdha prisoners, the last of several dozen an-Nahdha prisoners arrested during the early 1990s. Also released was Zakia Dhifaoui, who is a teacher, journalist, and member of the opposition FDTL (reftel). She was arrested for taking part in an illegal demonstration in Gafsa and sentenced to four months and 15 days in prison on September 15. Her case garnered international attention, and was raised informally by the French as part of the EU,s Human Rights dialogue with the GOT in October. By serving less than three months in jail, in principle she may return to teaching.

¶3. (C) Comment: The release of the last of the an-Nahdha prisoners is a positive development, as is Dhifaoui's release. The trials of others arrested during the Gafsa protests are ongoing, and the Embassy will report on developments as they occur. End Comment.
GODEC